

**Department of Commerce  
Occupational Safety and Health Program  
Report**



**April 2005**

**Department of Commerce  
Office of Occupational Safety and Health  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Room 5111  
Washington, DC 20230**

**Telephone (202) 482-4935**

## **Executive Summary**

The monthly Occupational Safety and Health report provides leaders and managers with an overview of the effectiveness of the Department's Occupational Safety and Health program. The report is based on the latest available data for the Department derived from employee compensation claims and measures the Department's progress towards meeting the goals of the White House Safety, Health, and Return-to-Employment (SHARE) initiative.

The frequency of accidents continues a downward trend and is now less than 1.5 accidents per 100 employees. This is below the previous five-year average of 1.89. The monthly rates from October 2004 through March 2005 fluctuated between 1 and 2 accidents per 100 employees.

The cost of accidents also continues a downward trend and appears to be slowing in the upper \$14M range. In contrast, the cost for employee continuation of pay is increasing. This cost was down in Fiscal Year 2004 but is rising in Fiscal Year 2005 and is projected to exceed the Fiscal Year 2003 cost. The total cost of accidents for Fiscal Year 2005 is expected to be \$14.4M with \$430K of that total going to continuation of pay. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will conduct a thorough analysis of claims to determine the cause. In the meantime, raw data indicates two initiatives that may provide some improvement. First, there are instances where supervisors have put employees on continuation of pay without authorization or kept them on longer than authorized. The compensation contractor for the Department, Contract Claims Services, Incorporated (CCSI), should determine when and how much continuation of pay to provide employees. Second, light duty, return-to-work positions, are not being rarely used as a method of bringing employees back to work. Recovering employees may not be able to return to their regular job, but can often perform light duty assignments. Experience has shown that using these programs returns the employee to their original position faster and reduces the continuation of pay costs.

The department did not meet the SHARE goal to reduce lost production days for Fiscal Year 2004 and will not meet it in Fiscal Year 2005 without significant work. This goal includes the cost of continuation of pay, which has increased in Fiscal Year 2005.

Based on the information in the report the following recommendations are made to reduce the injuries, illnesses, and associated costs. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will publicize these recommendations and work with bureau safety offices to implement them, where possible.

Supervisors should approve continuation of employee pay only when it is authorized. If authorization is denied, the supervisor should change the continuation of pay to sick or annual leave.

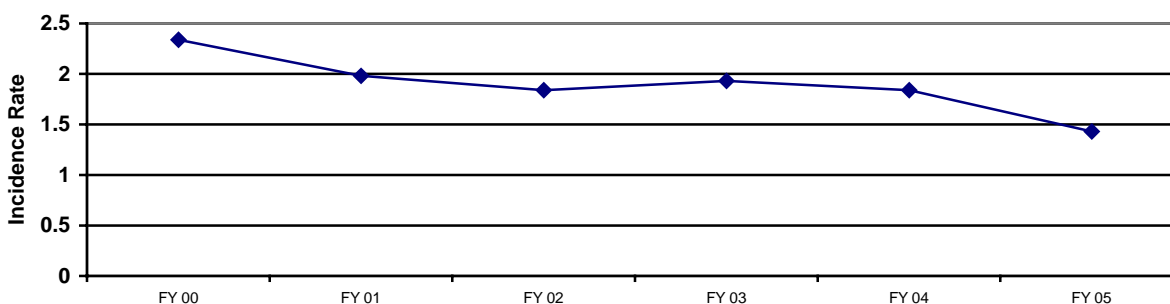
Increase the use of light duty return-to-work positions, where feasible, to get employees back into the work force.

Area Safety Representatives should identify uneven walking surfaces and recommend corrections to building managers.

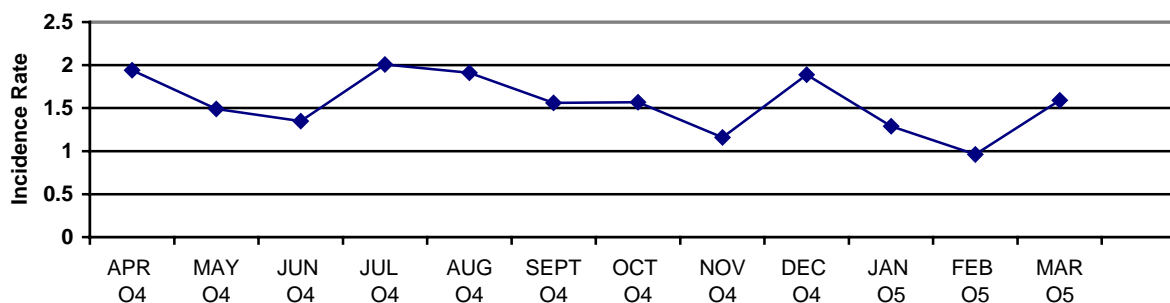
## April Report

**Purpose.** To provide managers and leaders within the Department of Commerce with information about the effectiveness of the Department's Occupational Safety and Health program. This report is based on the latest available accident data for the Department derived from employee compensation claims and measures the Department progress towards meeting the goals of the White House's Safety, Health, and Return-to-Employment (SHARE) initiative. This initiative charged Federal agencies with lowering workplace injury and illness case rates, lowering lost-time injury and illness case rates, improving timely reporting of injuries and illnesses, and reducing lost days resulting from work injuries and illnesses. Wellness information is also provided to assist employees in preparing for the summer season. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will publicize the hazards and recommendations in this report using the Department's web page. They will also work with bureau safety offices to further analyze the data and implement recommendations as appropriate for each bureau.

**Discussion.** The frequency of accidents continues its downward trend as shown in Figure 1. The Total Case Incident Rate is 1.43 incidents per 100 employees for Fiscal Year 2005. This is below the previous five-year average of 1.89. The rates from October 2004 through March 2005, as shown in Figure 2, fluctuated between 1 and 2 accidents per 100 workers. Reducing the occurrence of accidents will prevent injuries, illness, and reduce the associated costs to the Department.

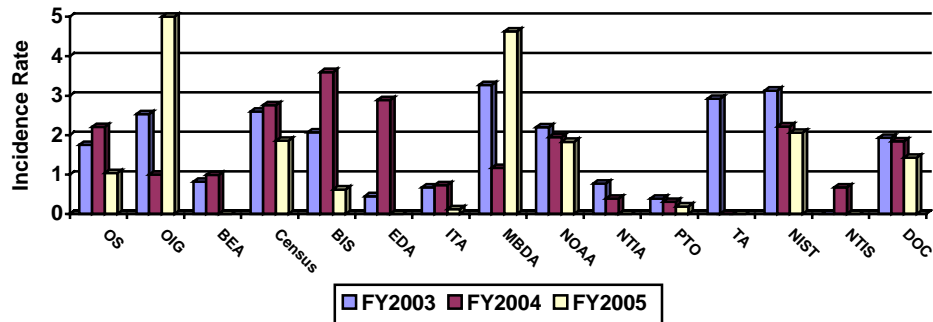


*Figure 1. Total Case Incident Rate Trend*



*Figure 2. Monthly Total Case Incident Rate Trend*

The three-year comparison of bureau performance in Figure 3 shows a great deal of fluctuation. Two Operating Units have experienced an increase during Fiscal Year 2005. If the numbers of accidents remains steady, these two bureaus should be at their Fiscal Year 2004 rate by year's end.



**Figure 3. Bureau Performance Fiscal Year 2003 through March Fiscal Year 2005.**

The Total Recordable Case Incidence Rate is down from previous years. The Total Recordable Case Incident Rate is 1.19 per 100 employees thus far for Fiscal Year 2005. This rate was 1.50 for Fiscal Year 2004 and 1.48 for Fiscal Year 2003.

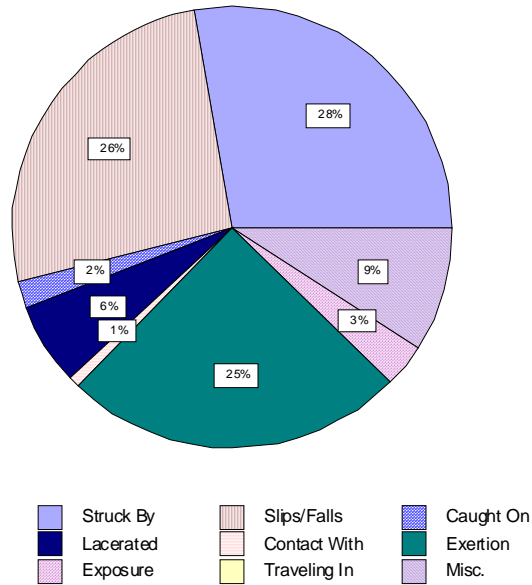
The charts in Figures 4 and 5 show virtually no change in the types of accidents that occurred in Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005. The three main accident types that account for most of the accidents unfortunately are considered by safety and loss control professionals to be the most difficult to control and eliminate.

The predominate cause for slips and falls is uneven walking surfaces. However, spills on floors caused several slips and falls. Corrective measures to prevent further occurrence include:

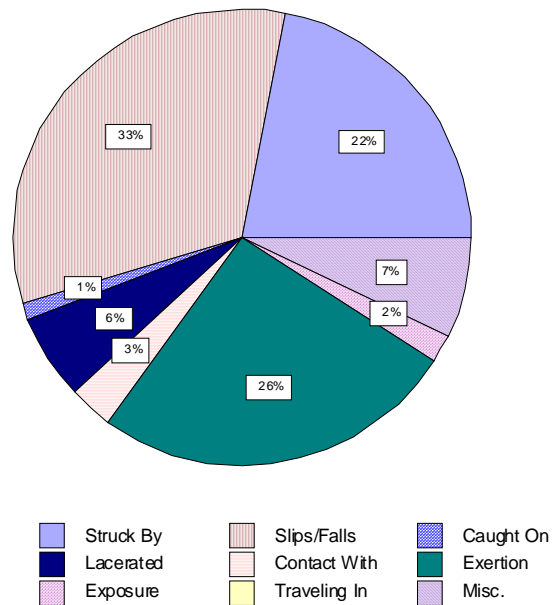
- Area Safety Representatives and Safety Professionals should identify uneven walking surfaces and recommend those needing correction to building managers.
- Building managers should correct uneven walking surfaces where possible.
- Building managers should check the coefficient of friction of wax being applied to floors by cleaning teams to ensure it is appropriate to prevent slips.
- Employees should clean up spills as they occur or report them to the building facility office.

In Fiscal Year 2003 accidents cost \$14.9M, while in Fiscal Year 2004 those costs went down to \$14.7M. For the first two quarters of Fiscal Year 2005, the costs are \$7.2M and will likely be at \$14.4M by years end.

The cost for continuation of pay (COP) for employees under the Workers' Compensation Program has increased. In Fiscal Year 2003 the cost was \$319K and went down to \$271K for Fiscal Year 2004. This cost is currently \$115K for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2005 and will likely be \$430K by year's end.



***Figure 4. Accidents by type for Fiscal Year 2004.***



***Figure 5. Accidents by type for Fiscal Year 2005.***

Forty percent of the “struck by” injuries reported so far in Fiscal Year 2005 involved a motor vehicle accident. This indicates a need for employees to drive defensively, anticipate the other driver’s errors, and to better judge the risks posed by motor vehicles as they cross streets or intermingle with vehicles as a pedestrian. The Office of Occupational Safety and Health will publicize this information using the Department web page and in concert with bureau safety offices.

Lifting and moving objects in the workplace caused many of the exertion injuries. Employees should use proper lifting techniques or seek the assistance of Department or bureau movers. Proper lifting techniques include:

- Lift with the legs by squatting down, picking up load, and standing.
- Use two personnel to lift objects weighing more than 25 pounds.
- Place objects on something four inches above floor level.
- Do not pick up an object lower than the ankles.
- Place items on shelves below the chest.
- Do not lift objects above the shoulders.

**Department of Labor Initiative.** On January 9, 2004, President Bush announced the Safety, Health and Return-to-Employment (SHARE) Initiative directing federal agencies to establish goals and track performance in four major areas. Federal agencies were charged with lowering workplace injury and illness case rates, lowering lost-time injury and illness case rates, improving timely reporting of injuries and illnesses, and reducing lost days resulting from work injuries and illnesses.

Goals and performance targets were set by the Department of Commerce through collaboration with the Department of Labor. The base year was Fiscal Year 2003 and the initiative continues through 2006. Each year the Department is to reduce total case rate by 3 percent, reduce lost time case rates by 3 percent, improve CA-1/CA-2 timeliness by 5 percent, and reduce lost production days by 1 percent. The measure for lost production days was changed in Fiscal Year 2004 to include continuation of pay data. The Department of Labor is measuring and tracking the performance of each agency.

The department met three of the four SHARE goals for Fiscal Year 2004 and will only meet three of the goals for Fiscal Year 2005, without significant work. The baseline of Fiscal Year 2003 is shown in column two of Figure 6. For Fiscal Year 2004 the Department exceeded the target of 20.7 for lost production days with an actual performance of 22. Figure 6 also shows that the Department forecast indicates it will exceed the Fiscal Year 2005 target.

Areas requiring emphasis include supervisors putting employees on continuation of pay without authorization, supervisors keeping employees on continuation of pay longer than authorized, and limited use of early return-to-work programs for occupationally injured or ill employees. A review of the claims does not indicate that employees are being injured more severely or are experiencing more severe illnesses than in previous years.

Supervisors within the Department are allowed to provide occupationally injured or ill employees with up to ten days of continuation of pay while waiting for approval from CCSI. However, the supervisor must follow up to ensure continuation of pay was authorized and if it was denied the supervisor must change the status of the employee for those days to sick or

annual leave. All continuation of pay data is recorded on time cards and reported to the Department of Labor. Changing the code corrects the status with the Department of Labor.

	<b>FY 03 Baseline</b>	<b>FY04 Target</b>	<b>FY 04 Performance</b>	<b>FY 05 Target</b>	<b>FY 05 Forecast Based on First Quarter</b>
<b>Total Case Rate</b>	<b>1.46</b>	<b>1.42</b>	<b>1.39</b>	<b>1.38</b>	<b>1.39</b>
<b>Lost Time Case Rate</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.66</b>	<b>0.60</b>
<b>CA-1 / CA-2 Timeliness</b>	<b>34.0%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>39.8%</b>	<b>53.8%</b>
<b>Lost Production Days</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>28.6</b>

**Figure 6. SHARE Program Goal Status**

The Department will need to sustain performance in those areas where the target was met and take opportunities to reduce the number of lost production days by:

- Identifying employees from Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005 who were given continuation of pay without authorization and change the status for days to annual or sick leave.
- Verifying that supervisors of employees with denied continuation of pay change time to sick or annual leave.
- Increasing the use of light duty return-to-work positions, where feasible, until the recovering employee can return to their original position.

**Health and Wellness.** The focus for health and wellness over the next 30 days should be on the hazards of summer pests, which include: fleas, ticks, mosquitoes, wasps, and bees.

#### **Fleas.**

- **Health Impact.** Fleas can transmit disease. Flea bites are usually not felt immediately, but become sore and irritating afterward. The bite is a small red spot with a light-colored center. Applying cooling preparations such as carbolated Vaseline, menthol, camphor, calamine lotion, or ice may relieve itching.
- **Control.** Use repellants, insecticidal pet shampoos and dips, flea collars, total release aerosols, and powders to control fleas.

## **Ticks.**

- **Health Impact.** Human tick-borne diseases are found in almost every state and are reportedly on the rise. The deer tick can carry all the bacteria that cause Lyme disease, Human Granulocytic Ehrlichiosis, and Babesiosis.
- **Control.** Spray yards if ticks are seen and during summer tick season. Keep weeds or grass well mowed. Wearing light colored clothing makes it easier to spot ticks. When venturing into fields and forests wear long pants tucked into socks, clothing with collars and cuffs, and long sleeved shirts tucked into pants.

## **Wasps and Bees.**

- **Health Impact.** Wasps and bees do not transmit diseases, but can significantly impact people by triggering a severe allergic reaction. Anaphylactic shock or death can occur in people who are particularly sensitive to bee or wasp stings. In most non-sensitive people the sting produces local pain, swelling and redness, which passes harmlessly in a few hours. However, medical attention may be needed for stings in the mouth or multiple stings.
- **Control.** Cover garbage, cover food, avoid or cap sweet drinks that can attract these insects

## **Mosquitoes.**

- **Health Impact.** In addition to their annoying bites the mosquito can carry West Nile Virus, Encephalitis, and St. Louis encephalitis, which are very serious human illnesses.
- **Control.** Eliminate areas where mosquitoes can breed. Drain or fill stagnant water pools, puddles, ditches, swampy areas, and tree holes with dirt. Also remove tires, buckets, tin cans, jars, toys, and other receptacles to prevent them from collecting rainwater or other moisture.

## **Future health and wellness topics will include:**

**May 2005** – Preventing cancer and healthy out-door food preparation

**June 2005** – Preventing and controlling diabetes and burns from fireworks

**July 2005** – Preventing sunburn and obesity

**August 2005** – Preventing rape and successful smoking cessation

**September 2005** – Health affects of Hypothermia and preventing colds and flu